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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001635

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In meeting with the Ambassador, Norwegian team appears optimistic that Tigers will return to talks

Refs: Colombo 1619, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met late September 18 with a visiting Norwegian facilitation team led by Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen. The GoN team, which had just held meetings with the Tigers, expressed confidence that the group would submit its counter-proposals on the GSL's north/east interim setup proposal by mid-October. Talks could then begin perhaps by November. The Norwegians also had comments on such issues as the Tigers' unauthorized camp in the east, the assassinations of anti-LTTE Tamils, and Political Chief Thamilmichelvam's role. The Norwegians are clearly taking an upbeat view of their visit. END SUMMARY.

Meeting with Visiting Norwegian Team

2. (C) The Ambassador met late September 18 with Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, Special Envoy Erik Solheim, and Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar. Helgesen and Solheim are on a September 17-19 visit to Sri Lanka. The Norwegians had just returned from meeting with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) political chief S.P. Thamilmichelvam at LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi in the north-central Vanni region.

LTTE Still Developing its Counter-Proposals

3. (C) Helgesen said he thought the meeting had been quite constructive. He expressed confidence that the Tigers would pass their counter-proposals to the GSL's July north/east interim administration proposal to the Norwegian facilitators by mid-October. This timeframe had been moved backward by a couple of weeks because LTTE representatives were planning to participate in a seminar on legal issues to be held in Dublin in the next two weeks. This seminar would be similar to one recently held in Paris, and would include participation by Tamil diaspora legal experts. When queried, Helgesen commented that the GoN team had not received many indications from Thamilmichelvam regarding the possible nature of the LTTE's counter-proposals. Helgesen, however, believed that the proposals would not be "maximalist" in nature. It was not clear whether or not the LTTE's counter-proposals would fall outside of the Sri Lankan constitution, he added. Most important, however, he believed the Tigers would be willing to re-engage in direct talks with the GSL.

Talks by November?

4. (C) Asked by the Ambassador about the timeframe for re-commencement of GSL-LTTE talks, Ambassador Brattskar replied that talks could restart by mid-November. Solheim noted that there was no suggestion from the LTTE that it would insist that the GSL accept its counter-proposals before the Tigers would agree to return to the table. Given the positive signs, Norway planned to begin general preparations for the talks, he noted. The precise agenda had not been settled, but interim administration issues would form a major part of the discussions. Brattskar remarked that he thought the LTTE would also be open to discussing issues related to the ground situation, including human rights (or "human security" as Helgesen referred to it), humanitarian aid to the north/east, and the Tigers' relationship with the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). Helgesen concurred, noting that he thought that the Tigers were looking to resume talks on a wide range of issues related to the peace process, and would not be focusing solely on the interim administration issue.

Other Subjects

15. (C) The Norwegians also touched briefly on the following topics:

-- Spate of Killings: On the killings of anti-LTTE Tamils, Helgesen said the Tigers were not forthcoming with any new information. He described the Tigers as clearly not having much flexibility in dealing with the issue. Helgesen noted, however, that the LTTE had tentatively indicated that it was willing to begin a dialogue with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) on the matter.

-- Camp near Trincomalee: Ambassador Brattskar noted that the Tigers had also not shown any flexibility regarding their unauthorized "Wan Ela" camp set up near Trincomalee. That said, they continued to discuss the camp issue with the SLMM, most recently in a September 15 meeting with the SLMM chief. Brattskar further stated that the Tigers had expressed their surprise over the amount of attention the camp issue was receiving in the south.

-- Muslim issues: Regarding the treatment of Muslims in the east by the LTTE, the Tigers felt this issue should be dealt with by local LTTE commanders and local Muslim leaders. The Tigers did not budge from their long-standing position that a separate Muslim delegation to possible talks would not be appropriate. The Norwegians said they planned to continue to discuss the Muslim delegation issue with the group.

Thamilchelvam's Role

16. (C) Queried about Thamilchelvam, Helgesen noted that the LTTE political chief seemed to be more comfortable with his newfound role as key liaison with the Norwegian facilitation effort and the rest of the international community. He was "definitely in charge" and was speaking with more authority, Helgesen remarked. Thamilchelvam seemed to have considerable "internal" authority in LTTE circles, Solheim added, but his level of experience regarding legal and international issues still needed more "development." In the meantime, Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's London-based spokesman, was not totally out of the loop, according to the feedback the Norwegian team had received. Balasingham's health was reportedly getting worse, however.

COMMENT

17. (C) Based on what the Norwegians described, the meeting seemed to have been relatively upbeat. Certainly, the fact that the Tigers are indicating that they are moving forward with developing written counter-proposals regarding what they want in the north/east (for the first time in the history of the conflict) and seem intent on restarting the talks are very positive signs. It is also good news that the group seems willing to open up the talks to a multitude of topics beyond the interim administration matter. If this is indeed the case, it would represent quite a climbdown for the Tigers who indicated when they left the talks in April that they wanted the peace process to focus on interim administration issues. While all that is positive, the fact that the Tigers are still giving the wrong noises regarding the spate of killings and the camp in the east remains worrisome. In light of the continued difficulties involved in dealing with the group, the Norwegians appear to recognize that the peace process could not by any stretch be said to be firmly back on track. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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